

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2021

Courant Community

LOCAL NEWS

Chamber holds Evening of Elegance



Tolland County Chamber of Commerce President Angie Chirico and Executive Director Melissa Smith honored former Executive Director Candice Corcione for her 28 years of service to the organization. **STEVE SMITH/COURANT COMMUNITY**

LOCAL NEWS



The Opening Knight Players rehearse a scene from the upcoming production. **STEVE SMITH/COURANT COMMUNITY**

Actors return to 'Pine Tree Corners'

Ellington's Opening Knight Players are returning to the stage with a mash-up of several classic holiday tales. **Page 3**

LOCAL NEWS

Locals celebrating milestones

From a fourth birthday to a 100th birthday and everywhere in between, we wish them all the best. **Page 4**

LOCAL NEWS

Complaint filed about ballot distribution

The State Elections Enforcement Commission is investigating a complaint from the SW GOP. **Page 5**



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Memory Tree on FUMC lawn honors loved ones

VERNON — STAFFORD SPRINGS — The 7th annual Community Memory Tree on the front lawn at First United Methodist Church, 8 Church St., is returning. To help the church turn all the multicolored lights to clear lights by Christmas Eve, donate \$5 per name.

Donations may be mailed to the church with your name and name of the person you are honoring. Checks may be made out to FUMC. All proceeds benefit Mission Shares. Call 860-684-2468 or email officefumcstafford@gmail.com for more information.

Children invited to write letters to holiday favorites

STAFFORD — From now through Dec. 3, Stafford children are invited to write a letter to Frosty, the Grinch or Rudolph. Letters may be brought in an envelope (no stamp required) with a return address on the envelope to Stafford Library, 10 Levinthal Run.

The letters may be put into the Red Winter Cheer mailbox. A letter will be returned to the recipient in the mail within two weeks. The holiday outreach is provided by the Stafford High School Drama Club.

Hike taking place at Hollister Preserve's Whitehouse Tract

GLASTONBURY — The Land Heritage Coalition of Glastonbury, Inc. will host a hike at Hollister Preserve — Whitehouse Tract at 1 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 28. No rain date is planned and the hike is of medium difficulty.

The coordinator and hike contact is Charley Smith at 860-508-1844. The docent/leader is Frank Kaputa, a technology consultant. His volunteer activities include chair of the Conservation Commission and Inland Wetlands & Watercourses Agency, Town of Glastonbury. He is president of the Kongsut Land Trust Inc., which manages 12 nature preserves totaling over 400 acres. He is also co-chair of the Notable Trees Committee, which is affiliated with the Connecticut Botanical Society.

Drive east on New London Turnpike. Turn right (westward) at the intersection of New London Turnpike and Tall Timbers

Road. The walk will start at the preserve entrance on the south side of Tall Timbers Road, about 200 yards from New London Turnpike. Navigate to 585 Tall Timbers Road.

The hike is free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served at the end of the hike. Organizers encourage all participants to be fully vaccinated against Covid-19 and suggest those who are not vaccinated wear a mask for the health and safety of all attending.

For more information on the Land Heritage Coalition of Glastonbury, visit www.lhcglastonbury.org or call 860-652-8995.

All Saints Church hosting annual Christmas fair

EAST HARTFORD — All Saints Church, 444 Hills St., is holding its annual Christmas Fair on Saturday, Dec. 4, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. The fair will feature a cookie walk, baked goods, nuts and candy, jams, knitted and quilted items, poinsettias, and Christmas gifts and ornaments. Also for sale are homemade waffles, quiches, jarred chili and soup to go.

East Hartford Holiday Fest celebrating 28th year

EAST HARTFORD — The East Hartford Holiday Fest 2021 is celebrating its 28th year with holiday festivities throughout town.

Holiday Fest is sponsored by the East Hartford Beautification Commission and supported by many town and civic organizations, churches and community clubs.

The holiday fest will kick off on Friday, Dec. 3, with the traditional tree lighting at the Town Green. The fest will run until Monday, Dec. 6. Guests are asked to bring a non-perishable food item for the local food bank. Visit <https://www.easthartfordct.gov/home/news/2021-east-hartford-holiday-fest> for more information on the holiday fest.

Gingerbread House Festival celebrates 11th anniversary

SOUTH WINDSOR — The Friends of Wood Memorial Library and Museum's 11th Annual Gingerbread House Festival opens

Friday, Nov. 26, and runs through Saturday, Dec. 19, at 783 Main St.

The Friends are celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the organization with a "Happy Golden Days" theme. Three local celebrity judges will choose the gingerbread masterpieces they think best represent different categories.

Ye Olde Gingerbread Shoppe will be open, selling holiday themed gifts and treats. Expanded festival hours are Thursdays and Fridays between 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. The festival is closed Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. For more information, visit www.woodmemoriallibrary.org or call 860-289-1783.

Book club, author event, felted ornament workshop taking place

MANCHESTER — The Manchester Public Library, 586 Main St., is hosting the following events. Check 'Em Out Book Club will meet in person for its November book discussion on Saturday, Nov. 27, at 9 a.m.

The group will discuss Andy Weir's Project Hail Mary. Copies of the book are available for checkout at both library buildings. No registration is required for this free in-person program. For more information, visit <http://library.townofmanchester.org> or call the library at 860-645-0821.

The library's National Novel Writing Month celebration ends with Connecticut author Megan Collins. Collins will talk about crafting a novel, working with a major publisher, and more. Copies of her book "The Family Plot" will be available for purchase and signing from Book Club on the Go. The program will take place at 7 p.m. Monday, Nov. 29. This is a free program for adults. No registration is required.

A program with Angelina's Felted Creations will take place from 6 to 8 p.m. Monday, Dec. 6. Participants will make a felted snowman ornament. All materials and instruction are provided for this free craft class for adults. Space is limited to eight people. Call 860-645-0821 to secure your spot.

Spruce Street Farmers Market taking place

MANCHESTER — Spruce Street Farmers Market will take place inside the gymnasium and cafe of Nathan Hale, 160 Spruce St., on Saturday, Nov. 27, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Shop local with 30 Connecticut farms, prepared food vendors, and artisans. Hungry Lion Food Truck will be outside, and there will be live music by Finn Rowan. SNAP/EBT will be accepted and doubled up to \$10. Visit <https://www.facebook.com/events/456838209036794> or call 860-647-3089 for more information.

Holiday tag sale to benefit Manchester Land Trust

MANCHESTER — A giant tag sale will benefit the Manchester Land Conservation Trust and its work to preserve open space lands. Shop Friday and Saturday, Dec. 3 and 4, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. each day at 330 Bush Hill Road, in the old cider barn.

Browse through 5,000 square feet of holiday décor, lights, artificial Christmas trees and wreaths, toys, jigsaw puzzles, books, games, dishes, tools, artwork, curiosities, furniture, near-antiques, and items both useful and decorative. There are 3.5 miles of trails at the farm, so guests can shop and hike on the same day. Visit www.manchesterlandtrust.org for more information.

Middle School Nights taking place at Manchester Library

MANCHESTER — Manchester Public Library, 586 Main St., will host Middle School Nights from 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 1, 8, 15, 22, and 29. The program is open to those in grades 6 through 8. Call 860-645-0821 for more information.

Free walk taking place at Manchester Land Trust story walk

MANCHESTER — On Saturday, Nov. 27, at 1 p.m., children, families, and adults are invited to a free walk at the Land Trust's story trail. Meet and park at the Trust's cider barn, 330 Bush Hill Road, and walk along the dirt road to the pavilion.

Guests will walk, read, and explore along **Turn to Community News, Page 4**

Courant Community

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Opening Knight Players return to 'Pine Tree Corners'

By Steve Smith
Courant Community

ELLINGTON — Ellington High School's Opening Knight Players are returning to the stage with a mash-up of several classic holiday tales, as they present "Christmas in Pine Tree Corners," which opens Dec. 3.

The troupe returned to live theatre earlier this fall with a production of "Twelveth Night," and is excited to produce the light-hearted holiday fare.

Advisor/Director Will Prenetta wrote the show in 2019, when the players were unable to put on "A Charlie Brown Christmas." This parody includes characters from "How The Grinch Stole Christmas," "Frosty The Snowman," "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," and "A Christmas Story," among others.

Emily Niger, a senior who plays Karen, from "Frosty the Snowman," explained that the premise is that the TV networks changed their format and are only allowed one hour in which to air Christmas specials. So, Santa put all of the casts together to decide which one should air, or an infomercial will trump all comers.

"My favorite parts are definitely the Grinch's comedic bits, especially his interactions with Frosty," she said. "He insults him, calling him funny names like 'popsicle' and 'ice cube.' The actor who's playing him, Jack Sprague, is really good."

Senior Roger Mandeville plays Linus, and explained that the Peanuts characters are kind of the hosts to the other characters.

"Everyone is sent to Pine Tree Corners, so the Peanuts are there saying, 'Why is everyone here?' and then help everyone figure everything out," he said.

Mandeville's favorite line, he said, is when Rudolph returns from a trip with Hermie, and the other character are not impressed by



Molly Deptula (Cindy Lou Who), Olivia Diamond (Snoopy), Jack Sprague (Grinch), Sam Beaulieu (Linda Lou Who), Tyler Salisbury (Boo Boo Lou), and Lily Hinckley (Lou Lou Who) rehearse a scene from "Christmas In Pine Tree Corners." **STEVE SMITH / HARTFORD COURANT**

the elf/dentist.

"They say, 'Oh.....hey..... Hermie,'" Mandeville said. "That's my favorite part."

Julia Wilson plays Lucy, which is a stretch for the actress.

"The way Mr. Prenetta has written Lucy, she has some pretty funny lines," she said. "I threaten knuckle sandwiches and threaten to slug people. I haven't played a character quite as bossy, but it's really fun getting to

play a snobby 5-year-old."

Audience members will be required to wear masks, and will be seated in pods. Actors will be unmasked while on stage.

The actors are thrilled to be back on stage after a hiatus of nearly two years.

"I'm thankful for this opportunity," Niger said. "The pandemic came in my sophomore year, and cut off half of our shows. It really affected my junior year, as

well. To be able to go back on stage without a mask in my last year of high school is really rewarding, and I'm grateful for that."

"It's fantastic," Mandeville said. "Having a live audience is way different than sitting in front of a camera and doing it."

"This will have an audience of all ages, because it's a tradition to us. I'm excited to seeing the audience's reaction," Wilson said.

The students said the show has "something for everyone."

"The show spreads a lot of joy and cheer," Niger said. "It's typically for a younger audience, but as a high school student, it's been putting a lot of joy in my after-school days, too."

"It's all stories that people will recognize, and it's a kid-friendly show," Mandeville said.

Performances will also

feature raffles and a silent auction, with some prizes related to the popular characters from the show.

"Christmas in Pine Tree Corners" will be performed Dec. 3 and 4 at 7:30 p.m., and Dec. 5 at 2 p.m., at the Gordon C. Getchell Auditorium at Ellington High School. Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$8 for students and seniors, and can be purchased at the door or at openingknightplayers.com.

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Menorah lighting taking place at Beth Sholom B'nai Israel

Manchester Road Race to sponsor blood drive

The 35th annual Ray Crothers Blood Drive will be held on Friday, Nov. 26, from

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Cochren & Co. to perform Christmas concert in Rockville

Library Friends hosting December meeting

Congregational Church offering Winterfest Café



A portrait of a young boy with curly hair, smiling, with a lake and forest in the background.

Happy 10th Birthday, Luka (11/25): “We love you! Mommo, Daddo, and Doggo.”

South Windsor GOP files complaint about Democrats' absentee ballot distribution

By Jesse Leavenworth
Hartford Courant

SOUTH WINDSOR — The State Elections Enforcement Commission is investigating a complaint from the South Windsor GOP that contends town Democrats illegally distributed hundreds of absentee ballot applications.

The complaint, which centers on the legality of preprinted signatures on absentee ballot applications that are mailed to potential voters, followed confusion over the rules among local political parties, registrars and election officials statewide.

The complaint by Republican Town Committee Chairwoman Kathy Daugherty and fellow party members says Democrats illegally included pre-printed, instead of “wet,” signatures for the person assisting with ballot applications for the Nov. 2 election. The SEEC “determined it was necessary to investigate this complaint,” agency spokesman Joshua Foley said.

“The one thing everybody is going to say is this is a Trump thing,” Daugherty said. “We are not looking to overturn this election and this has zero to do with anything on the national level. It’s about the integrity of the voting process.”

Democratic Town Committee Chairman Anthony Duarte, whose signature is the focus of the complaint, said the committee “followed the law regarding the distribution of absentee ballots in the recent municipal election, with the guidance of the Office of the Secretary of the State.

“The complaint has no merit and is yet another attempt by the Republican party to undermine the integrity of our voting process,” Duarte said.

Along with Duarte, the complaint names secretary of the state elections director Theodore Bromley and political consultant Michael Farina. The complaint includes copies of absentee ballot applications with Duarte’s signature as “person providing assistance.” Daugherty and the other complainants contend that Duarte’s failure to sign each form personally was “a blatant violation of the law” that invalidates every ballot in question.

Gabe Rosenberg, general counsel for the Secretary of the State, said, “The trend of losing candidates crying fraud and attacking the integrity of election officials in order to erode voters’ trust in our elections is a worrying one for our democracy.

“The claims made against Connecticut’s Director of Elections are certainly part of that trend,” Rosenberg said. “Those claims are false, and we look forward to the state Elections Enforcement Commission’s swift investigation of these allegations.”

Reporting on the issue in October, Courant columnist Kevin Rennie wrote that Newington Town Clerk James Krupienski first sounded the alarm on the issue after noticing the printed signature of the local Democratic Party chairman on ballot applications.

At a town clerks conference in late September, Krupienski told Rennie, a representative from Secretary of the State Denise Merrill’s office repeatedly stressed that absentee ballot applications must include the “wet” signature of the person assisting the voter.

Krupiensi said the instruction from Democrat Merrill’s office was clear and repeated during an August PowerPoint presentation to town clerks. The applications his office were receiving, though, did not appear to meet that requirement, so Krupiensi alerted the SEEC.

Bromley had advised Farina in an Aug. 9 email that a digital signature for the absentee ballot assister was permissible, Rennie wrote. But as more town clerks began to raise concerns about the applications, Bromley told Farina in an Oct. 4 message that he was seeing applications with names in a Microsoft script, as opposed to a digital facsimile of an actual signature.

Farina said of the complaint Wednesday, “We followed the law to the letter, and now Trump Republicans are attempting — just like Donald Trump did — to overturn an election by attacking election officials and undermining public trust. Their conspiracy theories, racism and fundamental lack of patriotism are a dangerous threat to American democracy.”

In an Oct. 14 letter, Bromley wrote to the SEEC to explain that a “miscommunication” had occurred over the application requirements. “This miscommunication should not affect the voters of Connecticut,” he wrote.

The fine for violating absentee ballot laws can be as much as \$2,000 per incident.

Daugherty said South Windsor Republicans seek transparency and assurance that voting is secure and legal.

“They need to button up the process,” she said.

Jesse Leavenworth can be reached at jleavenworth@courant.com.



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Pandemic takes toll on local winery — and the owner is selling. Asking price: \$3.2 million

By **Kenneth R. Gosselin**
Hartford Courant

COLCHESTER — When COVID-19 struck last year, Gloria Priam wondered if her farm winery in Colchester would survive, but the business boomed. As people grew fearful of being indoors, Priam Vineyards moved its operations outdoors, with tents pitched all over the property.

But the pandemic took its toll.

Her mother died from COVID-19, and Priam realized painfully that she wished she had spent more time with her. The isolation of the pandemic further brought into focus Priam's lack of family ties in Connecticut, with all her relatives being in the Pittsburgh area.

The pandemic also piled on more work that came on top of six years of a robust, but exhausting expansion with her current business partner, Jim Melillo, leading them to a difficult decision. They have concluded that now is the time to sell.

"It's incredibly hard," Gloria Priam said, walking along a row of grape vines now shriveled and dormant, awaiting a spring rebirth. "It's been 22 years of my life. There are so many things that you could do with this property that need to happen. I just don't have the energy anymore. I was a lot younger when I started this. I was chief cook and bottle washer."

Now, she said she wants to see her family more — something running the vineyard does not allow enough time to do.

The 40-acre farm winery on Shailor Hill Road is now on the market for \$3.2 million and comes along with a thriving wedding and event business — "agro-tainment," Melillo calls it — that Melillo said he believes is now essential in the winery business.

"We've done as much as we can, and it's time for the next generation, new blood," Melillo, 71, said, standing next to Priam and pointing across a field. "As an example, there are 12 acres over there, a beautiful, flat field. It's growing hay and weeds. It could grow more vines. It could grow marijuana."

A contemporary farmhouse on the property could become a bed-and-breakfast, and the property is zoned for a restaurant, they said.

Strong sales

Gloria Priam and her ex-husband built the farm winery together from

the ground up, starting in 1998, learning the business as they planted their first vines.

Today, there are 10,000 grape vines on the property and the winery turns out 40,000 bottles of wine each year. There are a dozen different kinds, ranging from riesling and rosé to chardonnay and gewurztraminer.

Farm wineries in Connecticut got their start in the 1970s. In the late 1990s, Priam Vineyard was only the seventh. Today, there are 50 licensed farm wineries in the state — a designation that requires at least 25% of the grapes be grown on the farm or locally in Connecticut.

A 2017 study by the University of Connecticut on the state's agricultural industry found that wineries enjoyed rapid growth between 2007 and 2015. The growth was driven by "increased demand for local wines, which in turn has increased derived demand for local grapes," the study said.

Sales in the same period soared from \$30 million to \$85.8 million. The industry in Connecticut employed nearly 1,000 at the time of the UConn study.

Bryan Hurlburt, the state's agriculture commissioner, said growth in the state's winery industry has certainly continued to grow since the UConn report was issued.

"You don't have to fly somewhere to visit a winery and have some great wines," Hurlburt said. "People are recognizing that Connecticut has some great farms and some great wines."

The Connecticut Wine Trail is one of many promotions that call attention to the state's growing winemaking industry.

At Priam, Melillo said, sales have grown 15% annually in the past six years or so since he became partner, investing over a million dollars in the vineyard, effectively jump-starting a business that had reached a plateau.

The sales growth, Melillo said, compares with an average of 3% or 4% annual growth for the industry. The sales at Priam include both wine sales and event revenue, he said.

Melillo said he had just sold a global management company when he became a partner in Priam. He jokes that being Italian, he was around wine all his life — but admits to a steep learning curve.

"There's being around wine and then there's being around wine," Melillo said.

Melillo's investment doubled the size of the tasting room and wine production area, adding Italian-made

fermentation tanks. Priam launched an online wine club that now has over 300 members and ships all over the country.

In 2020, Priam drew \$1 million in revenue and cleared \$300,000 in operating profit, according to an online real estate posting for the property.

Rare opportunity

It is relatively rare for a vineyard to come up for sale in Connecticut. But just this year, the Haight-Brown Vineyard in Litchfield, the state's oldest farm winery, also came under new ownership.

Competition is more fierce than it was in the 1990s. But farm wineries now can also offer craft beer as long as it brewed in Connecticut. Priam recently started offering Alvarium beer produced in New Britain.

Priam and Melillo attribute the success of their wines — they've won multiple gold medals at competitions in Germany and New York City — to the minerals in the soil.

"To be simple, I call it a gravel pit with 300 years of cow pies on top of it," Priam said. "It brings a lot of crispness, clear crispness — the balance of acidity to mineral is beautifully done."

The partners believe that Connecticut and the Northeast region of the country will continue to gain a higher profile in winemaking should climate change make the growing season longer and winters milder. A longer growing season gives more time for the sugars to get into the grape, Melillo said, balancing off crispness.

"I knew, at some point, the East Coast was going to be premiere because the West Coast was going to get too hot, and that's actually what's happening," Priam said.

The decision to sell the vineyard is intensely personal for Priam and not only because she was there at the beginning. Her paternal grandfather owned a vineyard near Budapest, Hungary, before he was driven out of the country during the Russian Revolution. The Colchester vineyard is named for him.

Priam said she hopes the next owner of the vineyard will see what she saw in the land and the potential for further growth she has often dreamed about.

If the vineyard is sold, Priam said she knows she will no longer have a say in how the land is used, and "I just have to let go."

Kenneth R. Gosselin can be reached at kgosselin@courant.com.

BUSINESS

Study: Connecticut is one of 8 states with fewer available jobs than workers to fill them

By **Stephen Singer**
Hartford Courant

In contrast to much of the country, Connecticut is among eight states where there are fewer open positions than potential employees, according to an analysis by Stateline, an initiative of The Pew Charitable Trusts.

"Historically we had a weak economy coming into COVID shutdowns," said Fred Carstensen, professor of finance and economics at the UConn. "So even as we recover you'd expect our recovery to be weaker than most other places."

The eight states are Hawaii, California, Connecticut, New York, Illinois, New Mexico, New Jersey and Nevada. Both Hawaii and Nevada are major destinations for tourism that were largely shuttered by COVID-19.

Data showing fewer available jobs than interested workers are unsurprising, he said. Other states with more "balanced and vibrant" economies are bouncing back from the pandemic with greater strength than Connecticut, Carstensen said.

In Connecticut, 0.8 job openings were available per unemployed worker as of August, according to the Pew study. Nebraska was at the other end of the scale, with three job openings per unemployed worker. All of Connecticut's New England neighbors had more jobs available than unemployed workers.

Patrick Flaherty, director of research at the state Department of Labor, said federal labor economists agree with state officials about problems related to gathering statistics beginning in the pandemic. As a result, he said he would "somewhat disagree" with the conclusions of the Pew study.

As of September, the most recent month available, the number of unemployed workers in Connecticut was 97,764. "That to me is not excess unemployment," Flaherty said.

Connecticut employers added 4,700 jobs in September, posting the ninth consecutive monthly gain. The unemployment rate fell 0.4%, to 6.8%. The U.S. rate was 4.8%.

Before the pandemic shut thousands of businesses, Connecticut's

slow-growth economy was characterized by low-wage jobs in warehousing, tourism and elder care increasing faster than higher paid jobs.

Also cutting into the state's economic growth is an exodus of college graduates for out-of-state opportunities and workers who live in Connecticut but commute to jobs in neighboring New York, Massachusetts and Rhode Island, Carstensen said.

The recovery is weak despite a broad vaccination in Connecticut that's among the highest in the U.S.

"We're in good shape in our health. You'd think we'd come back better in service contact jobs," he said.

In addition, Connecticut is not immune to a national trend in which nearly 4.5 million workers quit their jobs in the pandemic and its aftermath in what's called the "great resignation."

"Our quits are happening at the same pace as the national average," Flaherty said.

Economist Don Klepper-Smith said workers are staying on the sidelines.

"It doesn't feel like an economic recovery although data show the recovery began in early 2021."

In New Hampshire, where three times the number of job openings are available for each unemployed worker, industries across the board are reporting worker shortages, said Karmen Gifford, president of the Lakes Region Chamber of Commerce.

Banks and finance, home health care, hospitality and construction and building trades are all looking for workers, she said. Manufacturers are reporting a "huge shortage" of workers and are scheduling weekly on-site job fairs, she said.

Many workers who were forced to stay home during the pandemic and care for a relative or help a child with home schooling are now staying away from work, Gifford said.

"A lot of people in our area sold their second homes. They're not competing with the Joneses," she said. "They have their own budgets, their own lifestyles and are comfortable working part-time."

Stephen Singer can be reached at ssinger@courant.com.

Community News

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eccucc.org for more info.

Friends of Rockville Library collecting bottle receipts

VERNON — The Friends of Rockville Public Library are continuing to raise funds by asking patrons to donate their bottle receipts by either mailing them to the library, 52 Union St., to the attention of the Friends or dropping them off at the library in an envelope to the attention of the Friends.

The Friends continue to provide the library with the Book Page which comes out every month and can be found at the circulation desk. They continue to provide museum passes to library patrons which can be found online and printed, with a few such as PEZ that have to be obtained at the library.

The Friends continue to meet the first Thursday of each month at noon in the first floor meeting room of the library. Guests do not need to be members to attend the meetings. The next meeting is noon on Thursday, Dec. 2. Everyone brings their own lunch, snacks and drinks.

Toy drive to benefit Operation Elf, Connecticut Children's

STATEWIDE — The Connecticut Funeral Directors Association (CFDA) is kicking off its 15th annual holiday drive to collect gift cards and toys for military families and for children and teens in the hospital. Now through Wednesday, Dec. 1, 45 funeral homes across Connecticut are welcoming donations from the public for Connecticut National Guard's Operation ELF (Embracing Lonely Families) program and for Connecticut Children's.

In addition, on Thursday, Dec. 2, from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., people can drop off items to CFDA's 133rd convention at the Sheraton Hotel Hartford South, 100 Capital Blvd., Rocky Hill.

All gift cards, toys and funds collected by the Connecticut Funeral Directors Association

will be delivered directly to Operation ELF and to Connecticut Children's before the holidays.

Operation ELF will give items to families of the Connecticut National Guard and all branches of the military with a loved one in the deployment cycle that suffers financial hardship as a result of the call to active duty. Operation ELF welcomes gift cards of any dollar value for grocery or department stores, home supply stores, gas stations, and pharmacies, as well as unwrapped new toys for young people of any age.

CCMC toys and gift cards will be presented to young patients during the holidays and at different times of the year. Unwrapped toys should be appropriate for hospitalized infants, children or adolescents that do not pose a safety hazard, such as those with sharp edges or small, removable or easily breakable parts. Hospitalized teens will receive gift cards they can enjoy.

Donations of gift cards and unwrapped toys may be dropped off during regular business hours at any of these 45 funeral homes now through Dec. 1 — Ansonia: Wakelee Memorial Funeral Home at 167 Wakelee Ave.; Avon: Carmon Funeral Home & Family Center at 301 Country Club Road; Branford: W.S. Clancy Memorial Funeral Home at 244 North Main St.; Bristol: Funk Funeral Home at 35 Bellevue Ave.; Bristol: O'Brien Funeral Home at 24 Lincoln Ave.; Cheshire: Alderson-Ford Funeral Home of Cheshire at 615 S. Main St.; Cromwell: Cromwell Funeral Home at 506 Main St.; Danbury: Cornell Memorial Home at 247 White St.; Derby: Edward F. Adzima Funeral Home at 253 Elizabeth St.; East Hampton: Spencer Funeral Home at 112 Main St.; Enfield: Leete-Stevens Family Funeral Homes & Crematory at 61 South Road; Fairfield: Abraham L. Green and Son Funeral Home at 88 Beach Road; Glastonbury: Farley-Sullivan Funeral Home at 50 Naubuc Ave.; Greenwich: Castiglione Funeral Home at 544 Old Post Road; Kensington: Bergin Memorial Funeral Home at 96 Main St.; Manchester: John F. Tierney Funeral Home at 219 West Center St.; Manchester: Holmes-Watkins Funeral Home at 400 Main St.; Manchester: Manchester Funeral Home at 142 E. Center St.; Meriden: John J. Ferry & Sons Funeral Home at 88 East Main St.; Middletown: Doolittle Funeral Home

at 14 Old Church St.; Naugatuck: Alderson-Ford Funeral Home of Naugatuck at 201 Meadow St.; New Britain: Erickson-Hansen Funeral Home at 411 South Main St.; Plainville: Bailey Funeral Home at 48 Broad St.; Rockville: Burke-Fortin Funeral Home at 76 Prospect St.; Rocky Hill: Rose Hill Funeral Home at 580 Elm St.; Seymour: Ralph E. Hull Funeral Home at 161 West Church St.; Shelton: Riverview Funeral Home at 390 River Road; South Windsor: Samsel & Carmon Funeral Home at 419 Buckland Road; Southbury: Carpino Funeral Home at 750 Main St. South.; Southbury: Munson-Lovetere Funeral Home at 235 Main St. North; Stafford Springs: Introvigne Funeral Home at 51 East Main St.; Stratford: Adzima Funeral Home at 50 Paradise Green Place; Torrington: Cook Funeral Home at 82 Litchfield St.; Torrington: Gleeson-Ryan Funeral Home at 258 Prospect St.; Vernon: Ladd-Turkington & Carmon Funeral Home at 551 Talcottville Road; Wallingford: B. C. Bailey Funeral Home at 273 South Elm St.; Wallingford: Wallingford Funeral Home at 809 North Main Street Ext.; West Hartford: Molloy Funeral Home at 906 Farmington Ave.; West Hartford: Sheehan-Hilborn-Breen Funeral Home at 1084 New Britain Ave.; West Haven: West Haven Funeral Home at 662 Savin Ave.; Wethersfield: Farley-Sullivan Funeral Home at 34 Beaver Road; Williamantic: Potter Funeral Home at 456 Jackson St.; Windsor: Carmon Community Funeral Home at 807 Bloomfield Ave.; Wolcott: Woodtick Memorial Funeral Home at 420 Woodtick Road; and Woodbury: Munson-Lovetere Funeral Home at 2 School St.

For more information about the Connecticut Funeral Directors Association or its holiday collection drive, visit www.ctfda.org or call 860-721-0234 or 800-919-2332.

Hartford High's Class of 1971 reunion taking place in April

AREA — The Hartford Public High School Class of 1971 is hosting its 51st reunion in April 2022. Visit HPHS71.com for more information on the reunion. The reunion committee is looking to find as many classmates as possible. Email hphs71info@gmail.com **Turn to Community News, Page 11**

GOOD NEIGHBOR

Your reader-to-reader column

FREE

CAMCORDER: JVC Hard Disk Camcorder with LCD Monitor GZ-MG600 series. Great condition; rarely used. Includes remote control, battery, USB cable, AV cable, carry bag, user manual. Leave message at 860-402-3464.

VARIOUS ITEMS: Electronic Trailer brake, one set of extended tow mirrors for camper. Cat carrier, litterbox, dish and a scooper. 850-564-3864.

STORAGE BOXES: Two naval water-resistance storage boxes, 26 w x 34 l x 26 d and 22 w x 28 l x 22 d. 860-807-6030.

QUESTIONS

FOUND ON TROTWOOD

DRIVE: May have fallen out of a maintenance truck. Taco Cartridge Circulator 00 Series, PB Heat Circ, FLGO, Cast Iron, 007-HF5-18. If yours, call 860-236-1077.

LAWN MOWING, SNOW

REMOVAL: Does anyone know of someone who mows grass and/or plows snow? 860-289-0101 after 5 p.m.

WALKER: Seeking standard walker with wheels (not a rollator) for indoor use for elderly man with balance issues. 860-280-2797.

CAR: Seeking a donated good running car for elderly person in Putnam for doctor appointments. Cannot afford one. 508-335-5060. Leave a message.

WOOD CHIPS: Coventry gardener looking for a load of wood chips. Will pay for delivery. 860-742-6511.

COUNTERS: Looking to donate a 6 kitchen counter and matching 21.5 counter, waterfall edge and backsplash to Habitat for Humanity. Need someone to deliver it to organization. In good condition. 402-575-7422.

SEEKING GARAGE: In need of

garage space from now through mid-April. 860-212-6000. Leave message.

MECHANIC: Seeking mechanic for repairs of old pick-up truck for senior citizen. Please be reasonable. 860-796-6132.

VCR TAPE PLAYER: Seeking used tape player, free or inexpensive. 860-673-1335. Ask for Kathleen.

SEEKING CDS: Seeking English country dance CDs. 860-805-8337.

WORLD WAR II: History buff seeking anything from World War II, especially small, easy to display patches, medals, pins, badges, helmets, etc. Will consider larger items. Call/text Tom at 860-933-8521 or email twheinonen@gmail.com.

COMPUTER ASSISTANCE: Seeking female to help with computer assistance (how to scan photos, upload photos, etc.) 860-347-4594.

EBAY: Seeking female to assist for help with listing items on ebay. 860-347-4594.

BACK SUPPORT: Senior looking for Therapeutica spinal back support for car seat. 860-666-5699.

RECORDS: Seeking 45 rpm records for jukebox, 1950s to present, in decent condition. 860-882-2286. Ask for Ricky.

HELP WITH PROJECT: In need of someone to cut out top half of small narrow cupboard door and replace with glass. Reasonable. Text 860-869-2933.

SEEKING WORK: Seeking part time work cleaning stalls on a small horse farm with possible riding privileges. Years of experience in riding and barn chores. Call or text 860-817-7960. East Windsor/Enfield areas.

OIL STAIN: Seeking white oil stain. Will pick up. Call or text 860-202-6274.

SNOWBLOWING HELP: Seeking individual to snow blow driveway with incline in Suffield. Plow

Be a good neighbor

To submit, send an email to community@courant.com or mail to 285 Broad St., Hartford, CT 06115. Good Neighbor is a service by Courant Community. Questions and answers are provided by our readers and are not verified. Medical information cannot be published. Caution should be exercised at all times. The publisher is not responsible for damage to any person or property.

LOCAL NEWS

Tolland County Chamber of Commerce holds Evening of Elegance

By Steve Smith
Courant Community

VERNON — The Tolland County Chamber of Commerce held its biennial dinner and auction, An Evening of Elegance, at Georgina's Restaurant and Banquets in Bolton, on Nov. 13.

The event featured dinner, a silent auction, live auction, raffles, and music, and is the chamber's largest fundraiser.

Executive Director Melissa Smith said the event was slightly scaled down from previous years, but still very well attended and successful, largely due to the generosity of the auction item donors, as well as of those who bid on items.

"It was a little bit more intimate, but the space looked really nice. I thought it was fantastic myself," Smith said. "I loved the decor, I loved the space, and the food was wonder-

ful," she said. "What I thought was best was the networking and socializing - attending something in person, and getting all dressed up. We've had a few people who've called [since the event] and said they had a really good time."

The members' generosity, Smith said, had continued through the pandemic, and was evident again at the auction.

"People were very generous," she said, "which we were thrilled with."

Smith said that the numerous volunteers who helped prepare for, and execute, the event were priceless.

Candice Corcione, who was the chamber's executive director for 28 years, was honored with a short surprise presentation.

For more information, visit www.tollandcountychamber.org.



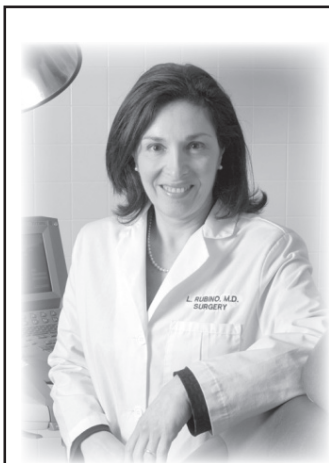
Items for the silent auction were donated from many local businesses and chamber members. **STEVE SMITH PHOTOS**



The staff at Georgina's of Bolton kept guests happy with delicious hors d'oeuvres.



Items in the silent auction included works from local artists.



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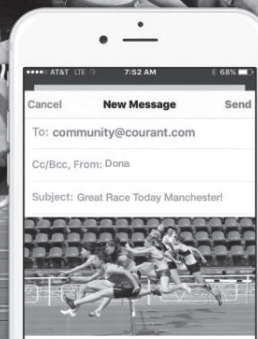
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Tajia Corcione (left) and Jackie Hutton checked guests in at the door. **STEVE SMITH PHOTOS**



Derek "DJ Derek" Egerman spun dinner music and served as auctioneer for the live auction.



Tolland County Chamber of Commerce President Angie Chirico and Executive Director Melissa Smith honored former Executive Director Candice Corcione for her 28 years.



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LOCAL NEWS

CROSSWORD Solution located elsewhere in this section

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CREATORS NEWS SERVICE

By Charles Preston

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Community News

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with questions.

Harry Potter Film Concert Series returns to The Bushnell

HARTFORD -- The Harry Potter Film Concert Series returns to The Bushnell with Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire in Concert, the fourth film in the Harry Potter series. On April 23 at 1 p.m. and 7 p.m., the Hartford Symphony Orchestra will perform the magical score live from Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire while the entire film plays in high-definition on a 40-foot screen.

Visit hartfordsymphony.org to purchase tickets. Visit www.harrypotterinconcert.com for more information on the concert series.

Unite by Light tradition to feature luminaries

AVON — SIMSBURY — For All Ages will host its second annual Unite by Light community luminary event in Downtown Simsbury on Sunday, Dec. 5. More than 1,200 luminaries will illuminate both sides of a one-mile stretch of Hopmeadow Street starting at 5 p.m., and this year's expanded event features new activities along the walkable route.

Community members and supporters may purchase two luminary bags for \$20, either online at forallages.org or at Fitzgerald's Foods, 710 Hopmeadow St., on Nov. 27 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

For each luminary bag purchased, an older adult in town will receive a bag to decorate, ensuring all ages are represented and included. Every dollar raised supports the event and directly funds For All Ages' intergenerational programs that mitigate loneliness and improve the health and well-being of people across the age span.

The evening is a true celebration of the power of intergenerational connection, bringing together more than 100 volunteers of all ages to assemble, place and light the luminaries. Visit forallages.org/unite-by-light for more information or to register to help with setup or morning-after cleanup.

This year, several organizations and businesses along the route will add extra sparkle and warmth to this evening of unity and connection. First Church of Christ, Simsbury will serve a community supper, with free-will donations benefiting For All Ages, and everyone is invited inside to see recently completed renovations. Simsbury United Methodist Church will play its carillon bells. Simsbury Fire Department will light its antique fire

truck. The Coffee Spot will sell hot cocoa. Guests are welcome to walk the route on Dec. 5, or drive along Hopmeadow Street to view the display. In case of inclement weather, Unite by Light will be rescheduled for the following Sunday, Dec. 12.

Holiday book sale taking place at Canton Library

CANTON — The Friends of the Canton Public Library's annual holiday book sale will return from Nov. 30 to Jan. 7, 2022. The sale will take place in the lobby of the Library during normal business hours. Many popular and hard-to-find fiction, non-fiction and children's books will be available for purchase. Visit www.canton-libraryfriends.org for more information.

Simsbury Public Library hosting book club, camera club

SIMSBURY — The Simsbury Public Library, 725 Hopmeadow St., is hosting the following events. Call 860-658-7663, ext. 2112, or visit http://www.simsburylibrary.info for more information.

On Wednesday, Dec. 1, at 6 p.m., join readers in their 20s, 30s, and 40s virtually to talk about current book picks. You do not need to be reading anything to participate. This is a partnership with Bloomfield Public Library. Register for the link.

The Simsbury Camera Club will host Joe Reardon as he discusses luminosity masks on Wednesday, Dec. 1, at 7 p.m. Register for the Zoom link.

On Thursday, Dec. 2, at 2 p.m., join Frederique for relaxation techniques to help yourself feel grounded and incorporate self-soothing techniques in your daily routines.

Bottoms Up raising funds at Avon Winterfest

AVON — Bottoms Up, a 501c3 public charity, is sponsoring a fundraiser to support patients and families living with Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. Avon Winterfest will take place on Dec. 3, 4 and 5, consisting of three days of activities at the Avon Village Gazebo and Green.

Live entertainment, a Biergarten, ice skating, live performers, photos at Santa's Workshop, more than 25 vendors for unique holiday shopping, a raffle to benefit Bottoms up Patient Family Support Funds and a tree lighting ceremony will take place during the three-day event on Friday night.

Proceeds support the Connecticut Children's and Connecticut GI, PC, serving in and around the Farmington Valley. Visit AvonWinterfest.org for times and details.

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The Camry forges on

By William Heald
Special To Courant Community

Some cars tend to grow old and vanish into the ether, especially these days when the family sedan has been usurped by fist minivans and later SUVs.

But the Toyota Camry is a true success story, and when you realize the company puts substantial effort in improving the car year after year it's not hard to explain its popularity and longevity. The car started out as a compact along the lines of the Corolla, and first appeared in the US around 1983. Over time the car has grown into a very roomy midsize and the bulk of the production for the US is now done in Georgetown, Kentucky.

For 2021 the Camry continues to evolve both mechanically and aesthetically, and one of the most useful recent improvements for those of us in the Northeast is the availability of All-Wheel-Drive. Five different four-cylinder trim lines have this option, and we had the good fortune of testing the sporty XSE version of the Camry with this traction-enhancing drivetrain.

Far from a compact now, the Camry is built on a 111.2-inch wheelbase and comes in standard form with Front-Wheel-Drive. There are both gas engine and Hybrid versions, with the gas versions including LE, SE, SE Nightshade, XLE, and XSE that are available with AWD. The XLE V6, XSE V6 and TRD versions are Front-Drive only. Engines in these non-Hybrids include a 2.5-Liter Dynamic Force Inline Four with 203 horsepower, or a 3.5-Liter V6 with 301 horsepower.

The gearbox is a Direct Shift 8-Speed

Automatic, and our XSE test Camry was an AWD version. The overall drivetrain was sufficiently polished that it's fair to say that even with a four-cylinder engine the Camry moves out well, even in slippery weather thanks to the power going to all four wheels when needed. There's Eco, Normal and Sport settings to tune the engine for the day's chores, and the Camry goes about its business frugally with excellent fuel economy.

The Sport Tuned suspension (standard on the XSE) delivers a firmer ride and aides in cornering stability, and overall the car handles well for such a comfy passenger sedan (much like the Camry TRD version).

The Camry interior displays some very contemporary coachwork, especially at the XSE trim level. This includes excellent leather upholstery and roomy, supportive seating that inspires long road trips no matter what the weather. A clean, traditional mechanical analog instrument cluster informs the driver, while the optional Navigation Package includes a 9-inch HD central touchscreen along with premium JBL audio and a host of technological additions.

Toyota's Safety Sense 2.5+ is standard and includes Full Speed Dynamic Radar Cruise Control, Lane Departure Alert with Steering Assist, Lane Tracing Assist and Pre-Collision System with Pedestrian Assist as well as other sophisticated technology. The rear seats are very roomy and supportive, with seatbacks that fold in 60/40 sections to add capacity to the 15.1 cubic feet of trunk space.

The 2021 Toyota Camry XSE AWD is EPA rated 25 MPG city/34 highway and with options has an MSRP of \$38,274. www.toyota.com



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Ornamental Gourds

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center



Along with the abundant fall harvest of fruits and vegetables, often fancy, colorful, ornamental gourds are offered for sale at grocery stores and farm stands. Growing top quality gourds can be an interesting experience and is not difficult as long as their cultural requirements are met, the fruits allowed to mature on the vines, and they receive proper postharvest care.

While we delight in their decorative value, in other parts of the world, gourds are still made into useful and ceremonial objects. In times past, gourds were frequently used in religious rituals. Gourds are believed to be a lucky token to the Japanese, and it was thought that a set of six gourds could improve health and spiritual power and that they would produce six fortunes.

The more decorative gourds are members of the cucurbit family which also includes squashes, cucumbers, pumpkins, and melons. These yellow flowering gourds come in many wonderful shapes – round, oval, long-necked, turban, warted and crowned. They may be cream, orange, or green in color with stripes, spots and bicolors being not uncommon. Mexico is believed to be their country of origin.

Another group of gourds is from the *Lagenaria* genus. These are larger in size and plants produce white flowers. This is a very old genus with some types used as water bottles as early as 2400 BC. Sometimes called bottle, birdhouse or sugar-trough gourds, they generally require a longer growing season than we have some years in New England so they are best started indoors and set out as transplants to give them a head start.

Both the above-mentioned varieties are rapid growing, tendril bearing vining plants. Trellising will keep the fruits off the ground and also save space. Gourds should be planted in full sun in a fertile, well-drained soil with a pH level around 6.5. Because they produce an extensive root system, space plants at least four feet apart. If mesh fencing is used, no tying is needed as the tendrils will hold the vines in place. Otherwise, it is necessary to start tying vines to their support when they reach about three feet in length.

Although somewhat tolerant to drought, keep plants well watered until they become established. A black fabric or organic mulch may be used at the base of the plants. Without a soil test, work in 2 to 3 pounds per 100 square feet of a 10-10-10 fertilizer or the organic equivalent. A side dressing in midsummer of about one-quarter to one-half cup of 5-10-10, worked in about 6 to 8 inches from the base of the plant followed by a thorough watering, will benefit the rapidly growing vines.

Cucurbita varieties ripen earlier than the *Lagenaria* types. When fully mature, Cucurbita gourds will become very hard. Gently press the surface of the gourd being careful not to break the skin to test for ripeness.

Lagenaria gourds turn from green to tan when fully ripe. If left on the vine long enough, the deeds become dry and will rattle when shaken. Frost will not harm mature fruits, but immature green ones need to be collected before the first frost.

Harvest gourds on a clear, cool day and leave an inch or so of stem attached. Avoid scratching or bruising the gourds as this will encourage decay and shorten the shelf life. Wash fruits in warm, soapy water to which a little bleach is added; then rinse and pat dry. Use fresh in bowls or other arrangements.

Drying gourds for crafts or decoration can take a few weeks to several months depending on their size. Look up specific directions for the gourds you are planning on drying. Drying typically consists of placing gourds on several layers of paper towels in a warm, sunny room, ideally at 80 to 85 degrees F. Turn them every day or two and cull any gourds that start showing signs of rot. After a week, wipe then again with a dilute disinfectant and this time place in a warm, dark spot for several weeks, checking on them and turning every few days. When seeds rattle, the gourds are dry and ready to use for craft projects or to varnish.

For information about growing gourds, or for questions on other gardening topics, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at www.ladybug.uconn.edu or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.

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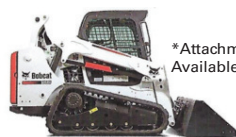
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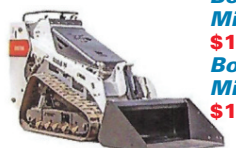
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